

Key Takeaways: June 2018

Across San Antonio's 17 school districts and dozens of charter campuses, there are promising signs of change and improvement. San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) is taking the biggest and most public steps by partnering with nonprofits, charter organizations, and local businesses to improve low-performing schools, offer specialized career training to students, and streamline transportation. There are early signs that other area districts are following SAISD's lead. As San Antonio's districts and charter schools move forward, the challenge will be to coordinate with one another and ensure that families are part of the improvement strategy. As schools innovate and offer new options to families, school systems need to provide supports to ensure equitable access, which may include further streamlining information and enrollment systems.

Challenges Ahead

► Collaborating citywide to address school funding and quality

Families in San Antonio face a complex web of options. The city has inter- and intra-district choice, as well as charter schools. This complex landscape also makes it challenging to pursue a coordinated strategy. Nonprofits, civic officials, charter schools, and districts must coordinate to ensure cohesion of services and vision, and some of this work is already in place. A new nonprofit, [City Education Partners](#), is helping to coordinate efforts across charter schools and districts, and a cross-sector coalition has been meeting to discuss streamlining school application and enrollment. But what is missing is a task force that holds regular meetings focused on priority issues with district, charter, nonprofit, and civic leaders. Others engaged in citywide education work, like those involved in pre-K and higher education, should be included, both to lend their expertise and to help build a neutral forum. Interviewees noted several issues that would benefit from citywide collaboration—notably inadequate state funding, especially for persistently low-performing schools. Other issues ripe for systemwide collaboration include more school enrollment coordination across district and charter sectors and the creation of a family-friendly school performance guide that includes schools from both sectors.

► Making sure parents are informed and included in strategy discussions

Involving families in reform work is a significant challenge for San Antonio, given the 17 districts in the city and segregation that has historically separated communities from one another. SAISD, by law, holds forums to involve families in school closure. However, more work is still needed across three areas: educating families about school quality and their school options, developing avenues for families to be included in school redesign and closure decisions, and closing the feedback loop so families understand how their input is being used. The nonprofit [Families Empowered](#), which helps families navigate the choice process, has extended its work to San Antonio. However, more supports are needed, including a consolidated school guide with all district and charter schools in the city. To better involve families in school closure and redesign, City Education Partners or SAISD's newly formed [Family and Community Engagement](#) (FACE) office can establish norms and procedures. The FACE office can also coordinate with the city's many direct-service and community organizations to gather input from families and communicate how community input is being used in strategy decisions.

► Transforming SAISD's central office to support school innovation

SAISD created an Innovation Office that oversees twelve Innovation Zone schools and supports the development of new school designs. The district also has a plan [to improve](#) struggling schools. In order to move forward on improving school fit and quality, SAISD should consider two recommendations: pursuing per-pupil funding with budget flexibility, and transforming the central office to support school-level decision making. By weighting funds at the school

level, students who need more support will have those dollars follow them no matter what school they attend. SAISD must also reassess central office spending and overhaul how it distributes funds to individual schools, so schools can have more flexibility to adjust curriculum, programs, and staffing to meet student and school model needs. The district must plan for what will happen when schools with low enrollment have fewer funds to support students, including those with high needs. And, SAISD must fully prepare school leaders and district program managers for their new roles within a more autonomous system. Some central office departments, like Curriculum and Instruction, Budgeting, Human Resources, and Professional Development can reorient to focus on school support rather than on compliance.

Spotlight

Recruiting Talent with Relocation Stipends

In the past, district and charter leadership in San Antonio have viewed talent as a competitive enterprise. However, a recent initiative uses a collaborative approach to teacher and leader recruitment. [Educate210](#) pays teachers to travel to San Antonio for interviews and then offers a moving stipend to those who land jobs. The initiative collaborates with city agencies and local businesses to offer rent reductions and retail discounts. Relocation support, one of the key features of Educate210, is [highly correlated](#) with increasing minority representation in the teacher workforce.

This initiative is part of other efforts to address a key challenge in San Antonio: recruiting and retaining teachers and leaders. Other efforts include partnerships with the [Relay Graduate School of Education](#) and [Trinity University](#). Combined, the organizations operate three lab schools that provide on-the-job training to teachers and leaders—district or charter.

The Educate210 online portal provides an innovative solution to attract talent. The portal can also provide data about who is applying to schools and what incentives matter most. Key next steps for San Antonio include projecting talent needs citywide and aligning training with the subject areas of highest need.

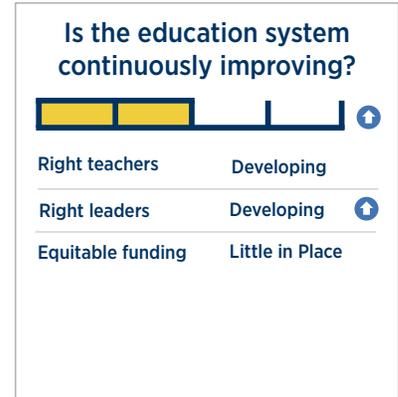
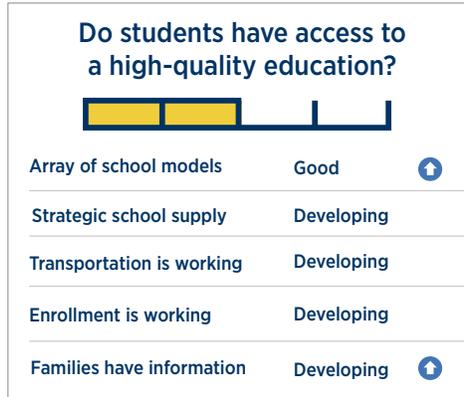
District Partners with Charter Schools and Organizations to Expand Options for Families

SAISD is pursuing a number of partnerships outside the district to ensure that students have the school model that will best serve their needs. The Texas charter school operator [Braination](#) specializes in serving students with social and emotional disorders. In 2017-18, the operator started managing a district school, renamed Afton Oaks, as a therapeutic day program serving secondary students.

Braination and SAISD negotiated a [contract](#) that outlines how they will combine their expertise and resources: SAISD provides the facility, transportation, and central office support, while Braination teaches students using its trained staff and vetted curriculum.

This is one of a growing number of partnerships between SAISD and nonprofit organizations. This includes partnerships with the charter operator [Democracy Prep](#) to turn around a struggling school, businesses like the [Culinary Institute of America](#) that provide career training, and local universities. Some, like San Antonio College at [Fox Tech](#), offer certification, while others, like [St. Philip's College](#), operate dual-enrollment programs.

System Reforms



Each indicator is scored with a rubric on a 4-point scale. We added the scores for the indicators to get an overall goal score. An arrow shows increase or decrease from the 2017 score.

Key Takeaways: System Reforms

The San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) has made a number of improvements over the past year, notably in school innovation, nonprofit engagement, and choice supports. Avenues for family involvement, school information, talent, school-level funding, and portfolio management remain areas for growth. Standalone charter schools also need streamlined transportation and enrollment.

Is the education strategy rooted in the community?



Is the whole community engaged? Education is a citywide endeavor. When families, community organizations, and city leaders have the opportunity to provide feedback and share in the vision, the strategy is more likely to be sustainable and meet the needs of all students. In this goal, we look at how well the city is doing with engaging key stakeholders.



Are a variety of groups engaged in education?

Local business associations, faith-based groups, nonprofits, and philanthropic groups, including the [San Antonio Area Foundation](#), have recently begun to ramp up their engagement in public education governance and policy. Newest additions to the conversation include, [P16 Plus](#), [City Education Partners](#), [100 Black Men of San Antonio](#), [Families Empowered](#), and [San Antonio Rising in Solidarity for Equity](#). These organizations bring educators, parents, and civic leaders together to push for policy change across the city’s charter schools and school districts. Every spring for the last three years, San Antonio has held a citywide education forum with over 400 business, civic, community, charter, and district leaders in attendance. Momentum continues to build, but there is still uncertainty about how these groups, and the communities they represent, impact decisions being made.



Does the city engage families in educational decisions that impact them?

SAISD has made it a priority to improve how it incorporates family input when making school decisions. However, interviewees reported that meaningful engagement with families is infrequent prior to opening, restarting, or redesigning district and charter schools. SAISD does incorporate community responses to school closures and restarts, but it is sporadic. SAISD’s decision to partner with the charter operator [Democracy Prep](#) to operate a struggling elementary district school was met with opposition from teachers in 2018. There is also no consistent work being done to involve families in new school openings or school redesigns.



Is there a strong and deep coalition of support for the education strategy?

SAISD’s superintendent and the school board have been generally aligned on education initiatives since Superintendent Pedro Martinez’s arrival in 2015. SAISD district leaders are in regular communication with most charter leaders in the city—a marked improvement over the siloed approach of the sectors in the past. However, there is still no cohesive vision that drives collaboration across the entire city.



Does the education system respond to community feedback?

Interviewees reported that most family engagement occurs at the school level, with little opportunity for families to give input on systemwide issues outside of public school board meetings. Both SAISD and charter schools share information with families through forums and letters mailed to student homes, but the district admits that this approach is less effective with poor and marginalized families. There is currently no method for collecting or reporting family feedback. However, several new systems are in place to improve family engagement. SAISD has recently opened a [Family and Community Engagement](#) department, and City Education Partners is working with community-based organizations to involve families and community leaders to work together for new model schools.

Do students have access to a high-quality education?



Do school choice and supply meet family needs? This goal addresses how well the city is doing with providing families access to quality schools. We look at what the city is doing to ensure quality schools are in every neighborhood, and how well the choice process is working for families who want to use it.



Does the school supply represent an array of models?

Over a quarter of all schools that opened or restarted between 2014 and 2017 offer nontraditional instructional models. In 2017, [SAISD opened](#) the Office of Innovation, which works with schools to provide families a broader range of school options, including Montessori and STEM. SAISD plans to move toward a more public process to gather ideas for new school designs. Interviewees noted that the lack of a charter school incubator resulted in most new charter schools being large regional or national networks.



Is the city strategically managing its school portfolio?

HB 1842, passed in 2015, requires a district to take action when schools have been underperforming for five consecutive years. The bill provides some pressure for SAISD to forge new partnerships with nonprofits and charter management organizations to support district schools and reinvigorate struggling schools. (HB 1882 is the partner legislation that provides incentive funding for districts to form these partnerships.) In addition to state action, SAISD uses local data to inform closures, restarts, and charter school renewals, but these decisions are still made largely out of public view. The district reported that it is trying to improve transparency about the criteria it uses to determine when and how to intervene. It is also overhauling the processes it uses to site new schools.



Is transportation working for families?

In the 2017-18 school year, SAISD began providing free transportation to all students attending district choice schools and programs. The new hub and spoke system allows for free transportation to out-of-district students, but it also means that students may have to transfer to reach their destination. Transportation in the charter sector is more sporadic—most schools did not provide transportation, forcing families to arrange their own transportation through carpooling or public transit. Interviewees reported transportation as a major barrier for families wanting to use the choice system.



Is the enrollment process working for families?

In 2017-18, SAISD introduced a [common application system](#) for its magnet and choice programs. SAISD is using the new choice data to identify whether the system increases segregation by income. Despite this improvement for district options, families must still navigate numerous applications and timelines to enroll in the city’s charter schools or at non-SAISD schools. A cross-sector coalition is meeting to talk about how to address these issues.



Do families have the information they need and know how to use it?

In 2017-18, SAISD launched a consolidated guide for district magnets and schools of choice. The district also hosted its first choice fair. These are improvements over past years, but the city still does not have a citywide, consolidated guide that includes district and charter schools. In the absence of any other resource, a local parent created [San Antonio Charter Moms](#) with information about citywide charter schools. Community leaders warned that many families still do not know what school options are available to them. Interviewees also reported that parents with higher socioeconomic status tend to have more information about school options than their less affluent peers.

Is the education system continuously improving?



Do schools have the resources they need? School improvement happens at the school level, but making sure resources are available requires sound, citywide policy. Having the right talent in a city is critical for schools to be able to provide students with a quality education. Schools should also have control over their budgets so they have the resources to address the needs of their student population.



Do schools have the kinds of teachers they need?

San Antonio has few vacancies, but finding the right quality and fit remain challenges. There are several new initiatives: [Educate210](#) provides stipends for interview travel and relocations. SAISD also has partnerships with several local higher education institutions to provide a pathway for teacher certification ([University of Texas San Antonio](#)) or a Master’s Degree ([Our Lady of the Lake University](#) and [Texas A&M University San Antonio](#)). The district has also created a partnership with [Relay Graduate School of Education](#) and another with [Trinity University](#) to operate lab schools that train teachers and leaders. In 2017-18, SAISD implemented a new teacher evaluation system to more easily identify teacher quality and fit. But more effort is needed to collect data about projected citywide talent needs and to align strategies to ensure high-needs schools and subject areas have the teachers they need. Interviewees noted that schools with specialized models lack the talent they need.



Do schools have the kinds of leaders they need?

Between 2014 and 2016, SAISD and the charter sector added 28 new schools. In general, the demand for top leadership talent has increased without concrete plans to build leadership capacity citywide. Education leaders from both sectors perceive problems with quality, fit, and proper placement. Competition between charter schools and the city’s many districts makes the situation especially challenging. There are some efforts to improve this, but the initiatives remain scattered. Educate210 is intended to improve school leader recruitment, and KIPP is worked with Relay to train 10 of its senior leaders.



Does funding equitably follow students?

Less than 5% of district funds are allocated to schools, and funds are not sent to schools using a student-based allocation formula (based on an analysis of fiscal year 2017-18).

Data & Scoring

Where did we get this information?

- ▶ Interviews with district, charter, and community leaders
- ▶ Policy documents from district, charter, and state websites
- ▶ School data from each city
- ▶ A 400-parent survey administered in March, 2017 in Cleveland, Denver, Indianapolis, Memphis, New Orleans, Oakland, and Washington, D.C.

How did we score the system reforms and goals?

▶ Each indicator is scored with a rubric on a 4-point scale. We added the scores for the indicators to get an overall goal score. See the [Methodology & Resources](#) page for details.

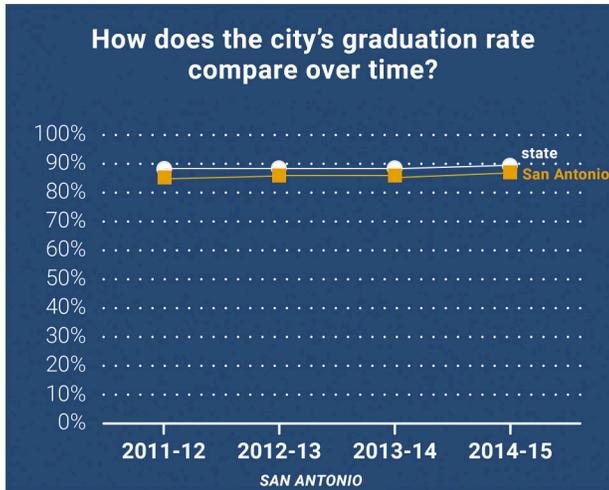
Score Levels

Little in place Developing Progressing Excelling Increase or Decrease

Key Takeaways: Student & School Outcomes

Although San Antonio’s graduation rates are on par with the state’s, there has been no improvement in math proficiency rates, and the city has fallen behind the state in reading proficiency rates. Students are disproportionately enrolled in advanced high school coursework; white students are slightly overenrolled while Hispanic students are slightly underenrolled.

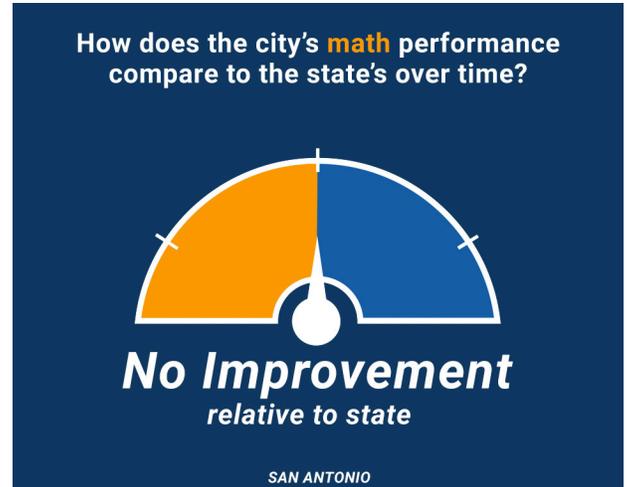
Is the education system continuously improving?



► In 2014-15, the city’s graduation rate was on par with the state’s.

Data: Percent of first-time 9th grade students graduating in four years, citywide and statewide.

Source: EDFacts Initiative, U.S. Department of Education, Assessment and Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates Data, 2011-12 to 2014-15.



► Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the city’s math proficiency rate trends mirrored the state’s. In 2014-15 the city’s proficiency rate was 5 percentage points below the state’s.

Data: The city’s estimated gains in proficiency rates across elementary and middle schools, standardized at the state level and controlling for student demographics.

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2011-12 to 2014-15.



► Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the proficiency rate gap widened between the city and state in reading. In 2015, the city’s proficiency rate was 4 percentage points below the state.

Data: The city’s estimated gains in proficiency rates across elementary and middle schools, standardized at the state level and controlling for student demographics.

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2011-12 to 2014-15.

About San Antonio

The San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) is the most central and third largest of 17 districts in San Antonio. Under Texas SB 1842, in 2016 SAISD elected to become a **District of Innovation**. As part of this effort, the district has developed an Innovation Zone and is developing partnerships with charter operators and nonprofits. The district has also improved transportation, enrollment, information to facilitate the choice process for families. The charter sector is partially coordinated with the district. A local nonprofit works with the largest charter management operators in the city.

School Choice in the City

Most SAISD schools are part of a designated feeder pattern, but there are a growing number of open enrollment schools and nearly every campus accepts out-of-zone/district students. Most charter schools have an open enrollment policy, allowing students from any district to apply. The two largest San Antonio area ISDs (Northside ISD and North East ISD) allow for choice within the district, but not across districts.

Governance Model

All 17 districts in San Antonio are governed by a school board. SAISD authorizes charter schools within district boundaries, and the Texas Education Agency authorizes charter schools outside SAISD boundaries.

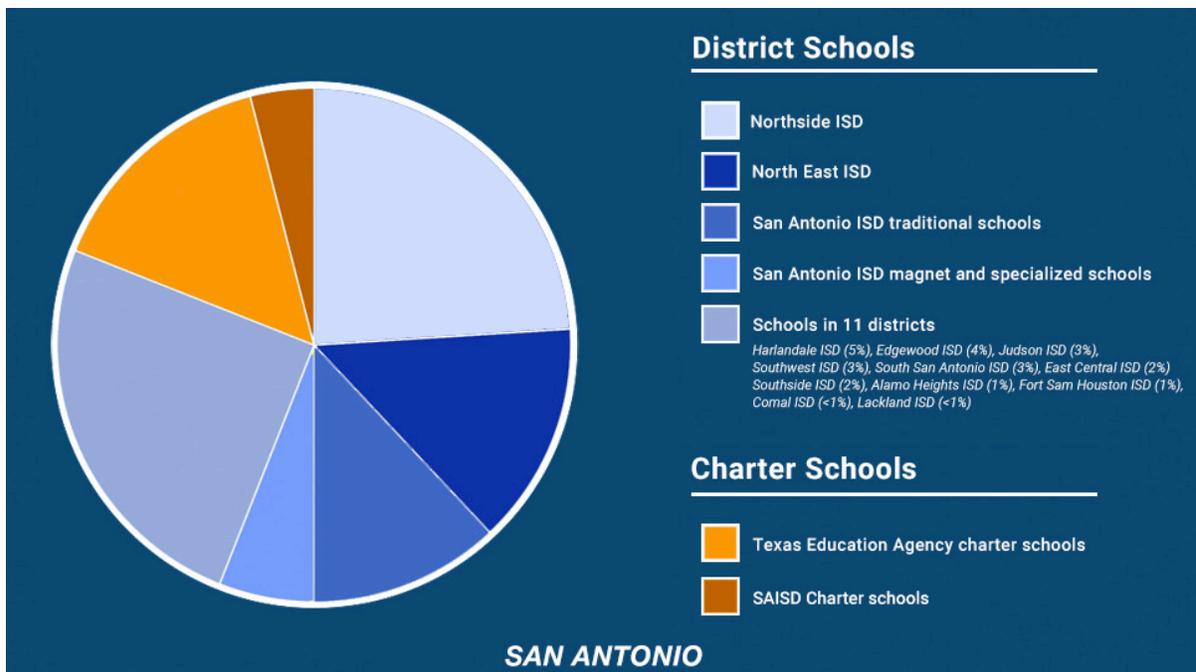
2015 District and Charter Student Body

Enrollment: 325,569 students

Race and ethnicity: 74% Hispanic, 15% white, 7% black, 4% other

Low-income: 65% free and reduced-price lunch

2017 School Composition



Source: Enrollment data from ED Facts, 2014-15.
School data from researcher analysis of public records, 2016-17.

About This Project

The Citywide Education Progress Report looks at how a city is doing across three goals:

- The education system is continuously improving
- All students have access to a high-quality education
- The education strategy is rooted in the community

Across each goal we present indicators of what the cities are doing (what we call “system reforms”) and how they are doing (what we call “outcomes”).

Our city reports focus on education strategies for the 2017-18 school year. Our analyses reflect developments through June 2018. These are updates to our original reports from the 2016-17 school year.

To understand how well cities are doing, we used state and federal data to track school improvement, graduation rates, and student access to high-quality schools. Our student and school data cover the 2011-2012 to 2014-2015 school years. To understand city strategies and identify early progress, we relied on interviews, surveys, public documents, and news articles from 2014-2015 to the present. This analysis uses data for district and charter schools to look at all schools within municipal boundaries, rather than just one sector or district.

We cannot say that employing a certain strategy will lead to a particular result, or even whether a particular strategy is effective in these cities. But the reports can help us to see how a strategy is working, what problem areas remain, and which cities are seeing promising results.

The 18 cities in this study include Atlanta, Boston, Camden, Cleveland, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Memphis, New Orleans, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Tulsa, and Washington, D.C.

To learn more about the project, compare other cities, and read the cross-city analysis, visit:
research.crpe.org/projects/stepping-up



The Center on Reinventing Public Education is a research and policy analysis center at the University of Washington Bothell developing systemwide solutions for K–12 public education. Learn more about our work at crpe.org.